

# RHODE ISLAND CHARTER SCHOOLS 101

## WHAT ARE CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

Defined in state law, Rhode Island charter public schools must meet the same academic standards that all public schools in the state are required to meet. They are:

**Open to all students and are tuition-free.** With a growing, unmet demand for these public school options, charter schools are required to hold blind admission lotteries to fairly fill their open seats. Applications for charter public schools do not ask for race, ethnicity, income, special education needs or language needs.

**Publicly funded by local, state and federal tax dollars,** just as other traditional public and career and tech public schools are funded. Equitable per pupil funds provide families with important public school choice options.

**Held accountable to high academic standards.** Rhode Island charter public schools are held accountable not only to their governing boards, but to their authorizers, the Rhode Island Board of Education. The Board of Education only approves charter schools that have demonstrated they can achieve specific educational and organizational successes measures. Once opened, charter schools are continuously reviewed, and a school may be shut down if it does not meet its set requirements.

## HOW MANY STUDENTS ATTEND CHARTER SCHOOLS?

During the 2015-2016 school year, Rhode Island charter schools served 7,000+ students from 32 of 36 school districts. Charter school students account for about 5% of the state's total public school population.

## WHAT IS THE DEMAND FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS?

For the 2015-2016 school year, Rhode Island charter schools received 13,579 applications to fill just 1,871 openings.

## HOW SUCCESSFUL ARE R.I. CHARTER SCHOOLS?

Rhode Island's charter schools are among the most successful in the country. A 2013 study by Stanford University Center for Research on Education Outcomes found that students in Rhode Island's charter schools were receiving the equivalent of 86 additional days of learning in reading and 108 days in math over the course of a single school year. By these measures, Rhode Island's charter schools had a greater positive impact on student learning than charter schools in any other state.

### 3 TYPES OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN RI:

**Independent Charter Schools:** Created by R.I. nonprofit organizations (in existence for 2+ years for a reason other than to operate a school) or R.I. colleges or universities. 15 of these schools exist:

- Beacon Charter School for the Arts
- Blackstone Academy Charter School
- The Compass School
- The Greene School
- Highlander Charter School
- International Charter School
- Kingston Hill Academy
- The Learning Community
- Paul Cuffee Charter School
- Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter High School
- Segue Institute for Learning
- Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy
- SouthSide Elementary Charter School
- Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts (TAPA)
- The Village Green Virtual Charter School

**District Charter Schools:** Created by existing public schools, groups of public school personnel, public school districts, or a group of school districts. 3 of these schools exist:

- Academy for Career Exploration
- New England Laborers'/Cranston Public Schools Construction Career Academy
- Times<sup>2</sup> STEM Academy

**Mayoral Academies:** Created by a mayor or an elected town administrator of any city or town within the state, acting by or through a nonprofit organization (regardless of the time said nonprofit organization is in existence) to establish a mayoral academy. 4 of these schools exist:

- Achievement First Providence
- Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy
- The Hope Academy
- RISE Prep Mayoral Academy

Student Demographics	R.I. Charter Schools (2015-2016)	Statewide Average (2015-2016)
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	11%	7%
Free or Reduced-Lunch	70%	47%
Identifying as Minority Race (Hispanic, Black, Other)	76%	40%
Special Education Students	12%	15%

(OVER)

## CAN ANY R.I. STUDENT ENROLL IN A CHARTER SCHOOL?

Yes. Rhode Island charter schools are open and free to serve all students within their enrollment boundaries (some charters can draw students from specific cities or towns, while others may serve students from anywhere in the state).

Applications for charter public schools do not ask for race, ethnicity, income, special education needs or language needs. As long as seats are available, all students that enroll are accepted.

If more students apply than the seats available, a random selection process (“lottery”) will be held. The lottery randomly fills existing seats and then, a waitlist will be created, with students names listed in the order that they were drawn.

## HOW ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS FUNDED?

Rhode Island charter schools are public schools and are funded the same way as traditional public schools, with federal, state, and local dollars. Under the state’s school funding formula, all public school students in Rhode Island receive the same per-pupil dollar allocation, whether they attend a traditional public school, charter public school or a career and tech public school. This law recognizes that not all students succeed in the same setting, and allows families to choose which school option is best for their needs.

While traditional public schools have larger operating budgets to support their larger faculties, staffs and operational costs, there are costs that charter schools must absorb that traditional districts do not, like facility costs. In Rhode Island, by law, traditional public schools are reimbursed for their facility costs at a rate between 35-90%, while charter public schools are reimbursed at a rate of 30%, regardless of where the school is located or what communities they serve.

Like all public schools, charter schools can work to obtain philanthropic monies and grants. While a percentage of charter school budgets may rely on philanthropy, an unpredictable revenue source, this percentage is still smaller than the overwhelming costs charter schools must spend on facilities.

## HOW ARE CHARTER SCHOOLS AUTHORIZED?

Charter schools are authorized by the Rhode Island State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education through a rigorous, quality-focused application and review process. In the past two years, 11 charter school proposals were reviewed by the Board, and only three were approved.

## ARE R.I. CHARTER SCHOOLS HELD TO THE SAME ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES AS TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

Charter public schools are held accountable to all state and federal academic standards as well as health and safety regulations, open meetings, and freedom of information mandates.

Further, in exchange for greater flexibilities to create new and innovative practices, there is a strict level of public accountability for charter schools in Rhode Island. Each charter school is thoroughly reviewed and evaluated at the end of its term. ***If a charter’s established achievement goals aren’t met, the Board of Education can shut down the school.***

## ARE CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHERS CERTIFIED?

Yes. Charter public schools hire Rhode Island-certified teachers who come from a wide variety of approved and accredited teacher training programs. In addition, teachers in R.I.’s district charters are members of teacher unions.

## DO CHARTER SCHOOLS PAY INTO TEACHER RETIREMENT?

Yes. Rhode Island’s independent and district charter public schools pay into the state’s teacher pension system. The mayoral academies may be exempt from participating in the state pension system, and provide teachers with portable 401k packages.

## ARE CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHER SALARIES ON PAR WITH DISTRICTS?

Yes. Rhode Island charter public schools pay similar salaries to traditional district public schools.